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Independent Learning:
A Common Essential Learning

A Study Completed for the

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Core Curriculum Investigation Project

by

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Executive Summary

Independent Learning: A Common Essential Learning

The purpose of this paper was to explore the Common Essential Learning - Independent Learning in order to define it in a manner consistent with the Goals of Education and in a manner usable by curriculum committees.

Independent Learning was defined as that learning in which the learner, in conjunction with relevant others, can make the decisions necessary to meet the learners' own learning needs. These decisions ought to be made within the bounds of social acceptability and by self-directed, self-motivated, willing learners. It is part of the education system's mandate to give support to learners in the process of becoming Independent Learners as well as giving learners the opportunity to be Independent Learners.

The review of the literature identified a number of notions which should not be part of this consideration of Independent Learning. Independent Learning is not an absolute standard but a direction or goal to be pursued. Independent Learning is not a set of identifiable competences but is more of an ongoing developmental process. Independent Learning is not individualized instruction nor is it learning in isolation. It does not demand a one-to-one relationship between teacher and learner. Finally Independent Learning is not permissive.

Independent Learners accept responsibilities and standards as well as understand the limitations imposed by available resources, prior knowledge, level of development as well as their personal skills, disposition and abilities.

Independent Learning is for all students regardless of level of ability or background. It is fostered by sensitive, flexible and responsive schools systems and school personnel.

Independent Learning has value from both social and personal perspectives. Society values those individuals who can freely respond to the changing demands of society. Individuals strive for independence and are better able to fulfill their functions as workers, family members and citizens when they are Independent Learners.

A model of Independent Learning was proposed in the paper. This model described the areas in which negotiations and shared decision-making can take place regardng the learners' needs, experiences and evaluations. The extent of sharing in decision-making is determined by the age, experience, developmental level, personal background and capabilities and situation of the learner. The teacher is, at least, a guide, mentor and facilitator in this process, as well as a representative of the values and norms of society. A series of objectives for Independent Learning are included in appendix A to assist in the process.

Implications for schools and teacher were reflected in the recommendations made. They are:

1. Independent Learning should be an approach and goal for all students regardless of intellectual and physical capabilities.

2. Parents and the community at large as well as school personnel should be advised of and accept the use of Independnet Learning as part of the K-12 students' educational experience.

3. Helping students learn to learn and love to learn should be important objectives in every lesson presented by every teacher in every grade and in every subject.

4. Learning experiences should be constructed so that learners will not only have the opportunity to be Independent Learners, but so that the learners will learn how to become Independent Learners.

5. A variety of resources both in and out of the schools should be made available to both learners and teachers.

6. Curricula should be written to give learners latitude to satisfy their own learning needs in the subject areaS.

7. School administrators must accept and promote the idea of Independent Learning as a Common Essential Learning.

8. Some part of the school day should be organized so that learners can use the resources of the school to meet their individual learning needs which may not be met otherwise.

9. Teachers should receive training in counselling skills.

10. Teachers should be familiar with and use instructional strategies such as Inquiry, Discovery, Cooperative Learning, etc. which teach and promote the use of independent learning skills.

11. Teachers should be provided with in-service and in school support in attempting to promote Independent Learning while teaching their subject areas.

12. Teachers should identify where, when and how they will let learners participate in the education decision-making process.

13. Student evaluations should include a description of how the student is behaving as an Independent Learner.

Introduction

> The purpose of the common essential learnings is to provide students with generic skills, processes and values which can be applied in a wide range of settings and situations (Core Curriculum Advisory Committee, 1986, p. 4).
>
> It is essential for schools to reduce students' dependence on schools and teachers for their learning and increase students' capability to set and meet their own learning goals (Core Curriculum Advisory Committee, 1986, p. 13).

The first statement above describes the mandate provided by the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee for the Common Essential Learnings. The statement takes learning beyond the boundaries of 'school' and places a demand on the schools to prepare students with generalizable skills for various and in some cases unknown situations. Also, because of the nature of the Common Essential Learnings this demand must be at least partially met as part of the learning experiences which focus on the Required Areas of Study.

The second statement above reflects the extent to which the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee defined the Common Essential Learning "Independent Learning". It is the purpose of this paper to explore the Common Essential Learning--Independent Learning--in order to define it in a manner consistent with the Goals of Education and in a manner usable by future curriculum committees.

The concept of Independent Learning will be discussed and a model to describe the concept will be presented. Implications for teachers and schools as well as a set of recommendations will be presented.

A Definition

Independent Learning is not a commonly used term in the literature. Although the concept has had wide discussion numerous terms have been used for it--terms such as: autonomous learning, independent study, self-directed learning, student-initiated learning, project orientation, discovery and inquiry, teaching for thinking, learning to learn, self-instruction and life long learning. Cross (1981) was able to compile more than 15 different attempts at defining and differentiating these terms.

However presenting numerous, conflicting and vague definitions is not the purpose of this paper. Therefore the following is an attempt to provide a usable definition of Independent Learning suitable for use in the education system in Saskatchewan.

The Collins English Dictionary definition of the term independent is 'free from control in action, judgement, etc.' (Hanks, 1986, p. 776). Learning is defined as "the act of gaining knowledge (Hanks, 1986, p. 874). Together the literal meanings of these words imply that Independent Learning is an acquisition of knowledge free of external control. The decisions of what knowledge, how, when and where to acquire it would be strictly under the control of the learner.

In the social context of schools, this cannot be an appropriate definition of Independent Learning. Schools and the people within the schools are bound by cultural expectations to

operate within the limits of acceptable behavior. Schools, in our society, are expected to participate in the education of the young members of society. The Goals of Education (Minister's Advisory Committee for Curriculum and Instruction Review, 1984) accepted by the Province of Saskatchewan provide focus for the schools of Saskatchewan in dealing with learners in the K-12 system. Therefore learners cannot be independent in the sense described above ie - free of all control.

The meaning of the term 'independent' must then be modified for the purposes of this paper to keep it consistent with the intent of the description of the term Independent Learning. This modification in meaning relates to a socially acceptable level of freedom or autonomy.

Independent Learning, then, is that learning in which the learner, in conjunction with relevant others, can make the decisions necessary to meet the learner's own learning needs.

This definition implies that the learner is operating within the confines of behavior acceptable to society and is using appropriate, relevant resources to assist in the decision-making process. This definition describes a situation where learners are self-motivated, self-directed individuals who willingly and appropriately use the resources (both human and nonhuman) available to them to make decisions and take actions dealing with their own learning.

What Independent Learning Is Not

As a result of the many and various names and labels given to the concept to be discussed in this paper a number of commonly held ideas which are often related to this concept are inappropriate for our purposes. This section will deal with some of these.

First it must be recognized that the idea of Independent Learning discussed here is not an absolute standard but is more of a direction to be followed, a goal to be pursued. No one becomes an independent learner in any absolute sense. Students should become more independent as they develop (Boud, 1981).

Nor is Independent Learning a capability or set of competencies to be mastered and then used throughout one's life. Rather it is more of an ongoing developmental process which is influenced by need, availability of resources, prior knowledge, disposition, and personal skills, abilities and capabilities.

Independent Learning is not synonomous with individualized instruction. In the way that phrase is commonly used, the teacher uses a medical model to diagnose, prescribe and monitor the students' learning. This approach creates dependence rather than fostering independence of thought and action. Although, when used in a collaborative and cooperative manner this approach can support the development of Independent Learning (Della-Dora & Blanchard, 1979).

Learning in isolation is another characteristic typically associated with this concept. As Atwood (1974) says "the

independence we are talking about is independence from constant supervision and direction, not isolation from the teacher and others who function as resources, guides and motivators" (p. 5). It is not the case that independent learners must do everything for themselves. It is the case that independent learners have learned to identify their own needs and capabilities and know when and often where and how help is needed.

Traditional approaches to independent study have focussed on the one-to-one relationship developed between the learner and the teacher. This is not a critical attribute of Independent Learning. A one-to-one relationship may be used as an instructional setting but it is only one of the many alternatives available.

Independent Learning is not permissive. It does not demand a total disregard for authority. Nor does it provide license to behave and operate in socially and morally undesirable ways. Although Independent Learning is learner oriented it should not be seen as 'selfish' learning. Independent learners focus on their own needs, decision making and problem solving abilities. This, however, does not detract from their need to accept externally set responsibilities and meet standards. Although it is best when those responsibilities and standards have been developed with and understood by the learner (Treffinger, 1975).

Given the above it can then be said that Independent Learning is neither teacher centered nor content centered but is

in fact learner centered. The implication of this being that the content to be learned and the teachers' approach need to be filtered through and responsive to the learners' needs, capabilities, dispositions, interests, etc.

From the school's perspective, Independent Learning can not be an 'understood', unspoken part of the education process. It must be articulated and publically stated as being an integral, considered and used approach in the school's day-to-day activities (Boud, 1981).

Independent Learning should not be interpreted as being anti-curriculum or anti-teacher. Independent Learning can be seen as an approach to learning and as such demands teachers to act as guides, facilitators, mentors and in fact, as direct instructors. The facts of changing ages, maturity levels, knowledge bases, etc. of the children moving through our educational system implies that mature, wise, trained teachers are required to guide and support students as they become schooled and educated.

Structured teaching is often seen to be a casualty of Independent Learning. This is not the case. Certainly not in the K-12 school systems for which this paper is being written. Independent Learning should be a shared notion between the learner, the teacher and others. Obviously in the early stages more of the responsibility will rest in the hands of the teacher. As learners become more competent at making decisions concerning their own learning, with the support, guidance and instruction of

teachers, these activities can be placed increasingly in the hands of the learners.

Independent Learning is not restricted to one type or level or class of student. It is a misconception to believe that only 'brighter' students are capable of Independent Learning or that younger students will abuse and waste the freedom that is associated with Independent Learning. Independent Learning does not seem to be related to academic ability but seems to be more related to the learner's attitude, motivation and sense of responsibility (Baskin & Keeton, 1962).

Finally it can be said that Independent Learning is not fostered in a school system which is typified by inflexibility and insensitivity to the learners' needs. Dominating teachers who use the school's responsibility to certify the academic capability of students as a tool to ensure conformity are not likely able to support the development of the processes involved in Independent Learning.

Why Independent Learning?

The definition has identified "decision-making" as a crucial aspect of Independent Learning. The implication being that the schooling process would be such that the responsibility for making decisions regarding their own learning would be or become the responsibility of the learner. The question remains; Why is it desirable to have learners independent in the sense used here when it comes to learning?

There are two sets of reasons for encouraging Independent Learning. One set deals with society and its values and needs and the other deals with the individual.

Independent Learning has value from society's point of view. Individuals who can rationally reflect on a situation and who are able to make up their own minds are respected and valued.

This independence of thought and action so valued in individuals is a fundamental characteristic of democratic society. The ability to make rational and free voting decisions is an obvious and highly desirable result of the process of Independent Learning. To the extent that democracy is prized so too is personal freedom.

This notion of democracy and free participation extends to the classroom. Where students are able to freely and legitimately participate in the classroom decision-making process, i.e. where the teacher has a democratic leadership style, the students have learned more than in situations where the teacher has an autocratic or laissez-faire leadership style (White & Lippett, 1960).

There is, however, another aspect of society which demands an emphasis on Independent Learning--that is, change. The inevitability of change demands that individuals be ready for change by learning on an ongoing basis. Jobs, family life and most other aspects of our daily lives have and will undergo profound changes due to advancements in technology, changes in

society's values and norms, etc. The Independent Learner can freely respond to the changing demands of society.

Schools, therefore, can no longer be satisfied with only providing a knowledge base. The knowledge base available for mastery at the K-12 level can no longer be expected to last a lifetime. A shift then, must take place. A shift which will see the schools provide a knowledge base but in addition will assist students in becoming Independent Learners.

As Malcolm Knowles has stated (Boud, 1981, p. 8):

> the test of the readiness of students to leave formal schooling would be demonstration of the mastery of the skills of autonomous learning.

Our society has placed value on the independent individual. Individuals within society also prize the independence and freedom implied by independent learning.

Knowles (1975) reports that proactive learners, that is those learners who actively initiate and participate in their own learning, learn better than reactive learners--passive, non-initiating learners. It is only reasonable that individuals who take the responsibility for their own learning seriously will be more involved, more active and therefore more satisfied with their learning.

This acceptance of responsibility, a crucial part of independence, also is related to improved self-concept, self-image and other indicators of emotional well-being.

Independence itself is something which people seem to strive for as they develop and mature. Our physical and psychological

development has us moving from a dependent state at birth towards greater and greater levels of independence, thus independence in learning can be a natural part of an individual's development.

Another reason for Independent Learning is the wish of individuals to be free of other's influence. People normally know what is best for themselves and do not want to have their fate determined by others. As well roles assumed by adults in our society often demand that individuals make decisions, plan activities and carry them out. Being responsible as a worker, family member and citizen in our society demands independence in thought and action.

Further, these roles are even better served by individuals who not only understand the pressures around them but are able to make and carry out rational plans without undue consideration of these pressures. Independent learners who accept the responsibility for their own actions and are self-confident and autonomous will play these roles well.

From a personal point of view independence implies freedom--freedom from undue influences, from domination, from constraints and restrictions, freedom to chose and to decide for oneself, freedom to determine what is important and freedom to pursue goals. This freedom cannot be seen as license. With freedom comes responsibility--responsibility for one's own actions and their effects as well as responsibility to safeguard and promote the valuable and the respected.

Finally, in terms of personal value, Independent Learners will come to see learning in a different light. That is, the walls of the school will not confine the learning in one's life. Independent Learners will see learning as functional and serving an ongoing purpose related to the wants, needs and interests of the learner and society.

Boydell has summarized these personal values of independent learning in Diagram 1. This diagram, focussing on self-actualization, puts autonomous learning at the heart of personal growth.

The Model

The definition of Independent Learning presented earlier stated that Independent Learning was that learning in which the learner, in conjunction with relevant others can make the decisions necessary to meet the learner's own learning needs.

This definition presents two elements for consideration. First is the relationship within the decision-making process between the learner and the relevant others. Second is the process of education within which the decisions will be made.

Children come into the formal education process being, in essence, independent learners. They have discovered and made attempts to understand their world; they have acquired spoken language. They have solved problems and made decisions. These activities have usually been conducted in meaningful ways by the child but have been limited by the age, experience, developmental

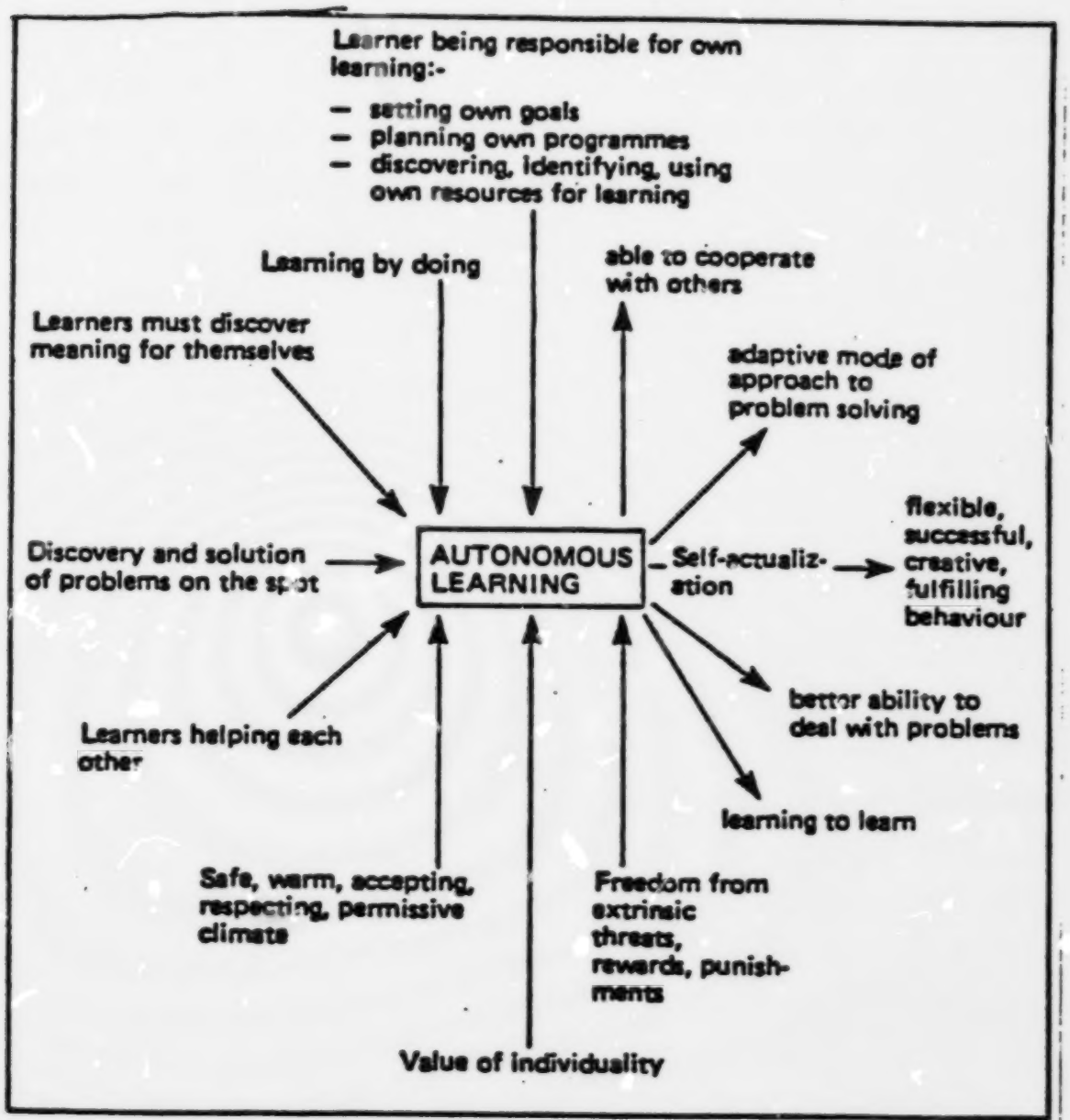

Learner being responsible for own learning:-
– setting own goals
– planning own programmes
– discovering, identifying, using own resources for learning
Learning by doing
able to cooperate with others
Learners must discover meaning for themselves
adaptive mode of approach to problem solving
Discovery and solution of problems on the spot
AUTONOMOUS LEARNING
Self-actualization
flexible, successful, creative, fulfilling behaviour
Learners helping each other
better ability to deal with problems
learning to learn
Safe, warm, accepting, respecting, permissive climate
Freedom from extrinsic threats, rewards, punishments
Value of individuality

Diagram 1 *Autonomous learning*

(from Boydell, 1976, p 42)

Based upon the ideas of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1962), Combs (1962), Dewey (1928), Harrison and Hopkins (1967), Knowles (1970), Rogers (1961, 1969) and Wight (1970).

stage and personal capabilities and situation of the child. Also, in most cases this behaviour as an independent learner has been more intuitive than conscious. It is the intent of this Common Essential Learning that the K-12 system of education promote conscious acceptance by the student of responsibility for their own learning. This also implies that the teacher has the responsibility to teach the learner how to make decisions and accept responsibility.

This decision-making aspect of Independent Learning can be displayed in the following manner.

other ---------- learner

This continuum portrays the decision-making aspect of learning as being in the hands of the learner, in the hands of another or others or being a shared responsibility to one extent or another. The situation portrayed at the far left end of the continuum is highly unlikely as it portrays a situation where outside forces totally control the learning of a particular learner. There is no question that a person must contribute in some way to their own learning.

Although, then, it would seem in theory that absolute control over all aspects and levels of one's learning would be the ultimate end (i.e. the far right point of the continuum) this cannot be the case in practice. Social norms, the expectations by society of the school system, the norms and expectations of schools, classrooms, teachers, principals and other students all have a limiting effect on this notion of total personal control.

Considering these limitations on the ability of either the learner or the other (teacher) to be the sole decision-maker this aspect of the model can be modified as follows;

other - - - | - - - - - - - - | - - - learner

The areas outside of the vertical bars identify areas unavailable or inappropriate. The far left area represents the idea that learners must be involved in some way in their own learning. The far right area represents the limitations that society and its institutions place on an indiviudal learner. The center position typifies the area within which the learner and others can negotiate and share in the decision-making processes. It is here that teachers can allow students to become more central to the decisions affecting their learning. It is also here that teachers and other professionals in the school and beyond can teach students the skills, attitudes and processes necessary for Independent Learning outside the walls of the classroom.

There are many opportunities for students to become responsible for their own learning. It is the responsibility of our educational system to provide these opportunities and to support the students in their efforts to make relevant decisions. Age, maturity, ability, knowledge, etc. are factors which need to be attended to by teachers in providing opportunities to students for self-direction, but which do not at any point exclude the possibility of self-direction. As students become older, move into more sophisticated levels of development, gain more

experience and knowledge they are able to accept more responsibility for their own learning and to make more sophisticated decisions at greater levels of complexity. It is therefore a matter of the school being organized to encourage and support a continued, increasingly mature and comprehensive acceptance of responsibilities for one's own learning.

Dressel and Thompson (1973) make this point well when they describe Independent Study as:

> . . . the student's self-directed pursuit of academic competence in as autonomous a manner as he is able to exercise at any particular time.
> (Dressel and Thompson, 1973, p. 1)

The second element of the definition of Independent Learning is the processes of education. The following list has been adapted from Knowles (Boud, 1981, p. 8).

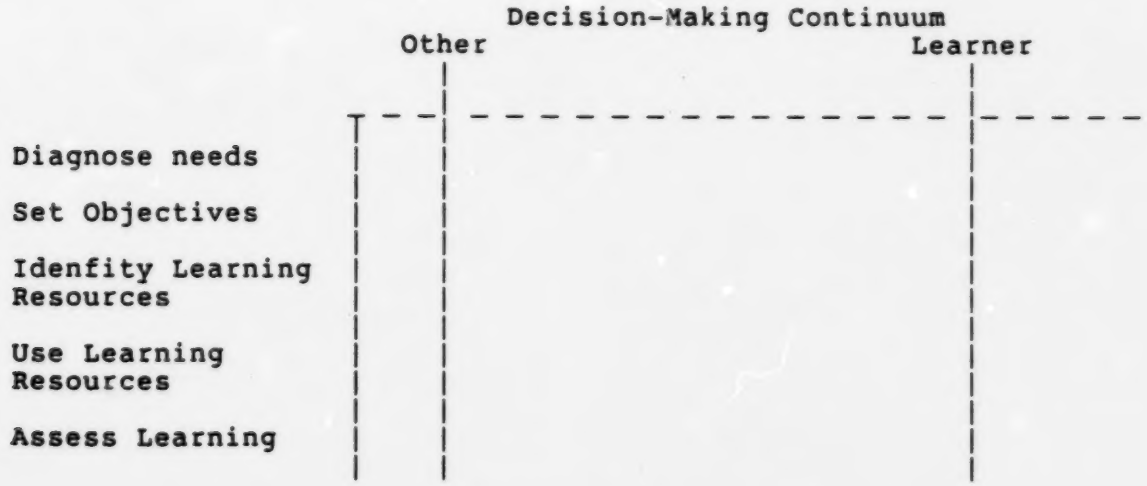
1. Diagnose needs
2. Set objectives
3. Identify alternative learning resource
4. Use appropriate learning resources
5. Assess learning

These are, in essence, the activities of anyone who wishes to structure learning. At present in the K-12 education system, many of these decisions have been made for us. Curricula are presented by the central authority which in effect diagnose needs and set objectives. Libraries and other resources are provided with particular emphasis on particular items and these in effect limit and influence the availability and choice of learning

resources. It is also an expectation that the authorities of the schools will assess learning.

These imposed decisions are generally at a macro level and relate to the 'functions' of the institution and are necessary to ensure that the role of the institution is fulfilled in a manner acceptable to society. It is at the "convention" (Postman and Weingartner, 1973) level, that is the micro or operational level, the school and classroom level where teachers and students can <u>together</u> move through these activities in meaningful ways to promote Independent Learning. A series of objectives which, if met, would allow learners to perform these activities is presented in Appendix A.

This definition can then be displayed as a model of Independent Learning as follows.



Each of the elements of the definition of Independent Learning are systemic, that is, each individual section is

dependent upon and affects each of the other sections. To advance students' Independent Learning capabilities no one piece of this model can be addressed in total isolation or without a knowledge of where and how that piece fits with the others.

The behaviour and process dimensions of this model should not be seen as linear descriptors of learner or teacher behaviour. It is not necessary to begin at 'diagnosing needs' and end up at 'assessment validation'. The combination of processes and behaviours will be dictated by need, circumstance and common sense. Nor is there a direct subject area match--Independent Learning is suitable in all subjects and at all grades. In fact in all subjects and in all grades there are opportunities for learners to behave as Independent Learners and to learn and practice new Independent Learning skills.

This model can be used as a guide for teachers in the K-12 system in developing and supporting Independent Learning in their students. As stated before in this paper the crucial aspect of Independent Learning is the students' acceptance of responsibility and control of their own learning. So, the crucial dimension of the model is the decision-making dimension. If Independent Learning is to be a reality it is the responsibility of the teacher to help the student move toward a personally and socially acceptable point on the decision-making continuum. In order to do this teachers must be willing and able to relinquish control, at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner, of the teaching/learning behaviours. As

well, students must learn/be taught how to negotiate and share responsibility in socially acceptable ways.

To promote Independent Learning teachers must assist students in taking the responsibility for their own learning, help students practice to master the decision-making processes which will help them know when and how to ask others to assist them in their learning. This model as used by the Independent Learner suggests that learners either perform the processes themselves or delegate the authority to others.

It is the orderly shifting along the decision-making contiuum which becomes the focus of this Common Essential Learning. As the teacher, at any level, is preparing to teach, this model can be used to help the teacher make decisions about what the learner will take responsibility for and how they will take that responsibility. The model is a reminder that, to the extent possible, as dictated by the age, experience, knowledge base, etc. of the student, decisions regarding the education processes should be collaborative efforts between the learner and the teacher.

At the earliest levels of attempting to master these behaviours and processes the teacher may have substantial input - at later stages the learner must take the lead in accepting and exercising responsibility. Also, because this is addressing the K-12 system, learners at this point must also be accountable for their learning and behaviors.

The teachers role, at least in the development of Independent Learning in students, is at first to provide a knowledge base and to introduce the skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary to become an Independent Learner. Then judgements must be made about the learner's ability to accept the responsibility for parts or all of their own learning and the extent to which the teacher is willing to transfer this control of learning to the learner. Ultimately the teacher becomes another resource for the Independent Learner to use - albeit, a very available resource, one with special skills and one who because of the organization of schools can, if appropriate, assume the responsibility for the student's learning.

Implications for Schools and Teachers

> If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind (Gibran, 1923)

Learning has at least two aspects; acquisition of new knowledge/experience and uncovering the personal meaning of this knowledge/experience (Combs, Avila and Purkey, 1971). Schools and teachers have assisted students in the acquisition of new knowledge very well. However the educational system seems little used in the pursuit of individual personal meaning. The requirements which demand that students learn the same things, for the same reasons, in the same ways and to be assessed in the same way minimizes meaningful learning (Rogers, 1969). A desire to develop Independent Learning in students indicates that a

shift is necessary in teachers' approaches, attitudes and behaviours.

As graphically described in the model the crucial element in promoting Independent Learning is the learner's ability to be able to make responsible decisions in as many aspects of the overall learning process as possible. Teachers must remain an active participant with students both individually and in groups in all aspects of the learning process for it is the teachers along with the students who manage, direct and make decisions about this "transfer of control". Also as this takes place in the K-12 system, teachers represent and are responsible to society in terms of what is done in schools and how it is done.

The traditional teacher-prescribed, -presented, -paced and -assessed course does not contribute to the Independent Learning process. It is a responsibility of the teachers' that students' participation, to the extent the students are capable and it is appropriate, be encouraged, supported and even perhaps demanded. In the initial stages of learning (regardless of the age and maturity of the learner) the responsibility of determining capability and appropriateness may fall more to the teacher while this responsibility ought to shift to the learner as learning proceeds.

Teachers need to see education arising from the needs of the student to relate to society and culture rather than arising from the needs of "content" (Gleason, 1967). This conception of meeting the needs of the learner will enhance the capabilities of

schools in promoting and sustaining Independent Learning rather than stifling the inclination toward Independent Learning most students bring to school.

Instructional techniques, strategies and approaches which are developed and executed with collaboration between learner and teachers should be used more extensively. These approaches such as inquiry, independent study, cooperative work groups, which encourage student participation in determining goals, and in monitoring learning processes should be encouraged. Specific techniques which help students build self-confidence and increase their willingness to accept responsibility for their own learning are desirable.

Finally the atmosphere, environment and structure of the school itself must support Independent Learning. A culture must be developed which demands that everyone in the system take responsibility, respect standards and norms and strive for personal fulfillment. Students need to see teachers, principals and others in the school modelling Independent Learning behaviours. Students need to be treated as Independent Learners. Students need to see the curriculum change process as an example of how the institution can support Independent Learning.

With all of this reorienting of perspective by teachers and within the school itself it must be remembered that no matter how "free" we believe we have allowed our students to become they and we are still constrained by the demands, pressures and inducements of the society surrounding them and us as well as our

personal limitations in terms of ability, character, maturity, etc.

Conclusion

The speed with which change takes place in our society makes it clear that individuals will need to be learning new and different ideas, skills and processes throughout their lives. Public schooling which usually spans the ages of 6-18 cannot possibly hope to provide instruction in all of the ideas, skills and processes a person will need throughout their lives. This is based on three reasons:

1) every student in the K-12 system likely has different long term needs and goals,

2) there is presently too much to learn in the 12 years available, and

3) much of what will be needed in the students' adult life is likely not even known now.

What then, can schools (the K-12 system) do to have a positive influence beyond the 12th grade? Saskatchewan Education has proposed 9 goals of education. The goals relating to the abilities necessary to be able to cope with future learning needs are "Basic Skills" and "Life-Long Learning".

These have been interpreted, for the K-12 system, through a core curriculum made up of a) Required Areas of Study which are the organizers for curriculum planning, and b) Common Essential Learnings which are meant to "pervade each student's experience

in school" (Core Curriculum Advisory Committee, p. 11) as well as "to provide students with generic skills, processes, values and cognitive abilities" (Core Curriculum Advisory Committee, p. 11). The Common Essential Learning most directly related to the problem of future change and learning needs of the future is "Independent Learning".

In the context of change and unknown future needs it is appropriate that Life-Long Learning is a goal of Saskatchewan Education and that Independent Learning is a Common Essential Learning. These skills and attitudes will allow individuals to take advantage of and/or create learning situations as they are needed.

The curriculum and the teacher will not always be there, available, or appropriate. Individuals must have the skills and disposition to take control over their own future. They ought not to be encouraged to be dependent on others to direct and control their learning. Individuals should be able to decide when and how to determine their own needs and how best to meet those needs. The Independent Learning approach is well suited to meet this goal.

The opportunity for Independent Learning has a number of positive outcomes for the student and society. Learners will develop an intellectual curiosity which will broaden their education and experience base. They will be able to cope with the effect change has on them as individuals and society. They will become more flexible and adaptable when facing new and/or

different circumstance. They will be able to assess and understand change in their society. They will be able to make independent decisions based on understood data and thus contribute in a positive way to our democratic society.

Individuals who are Life-Long Learners and engage in Independent Learning will become self-determined, self-disciplined, resourceful and self evaluating. They will also claim responsibility for their learning and develop a respect for themselves as individuals in control of themselves and with some measure of control of their environment.

Recommendations

As a result of the development of the paper, including the review of pertinent literature, its analysis and the synthesis necessary to produce this paper the following recommendations were generated:

1. Independent Learning should be an approach and goal for all students regardless of intellectual and physical capabilities.
2. Parents and the community at large as well as school personnel should be advised of and accept the use of Independent Learning as part of the K-12 students' educational experience.
3. Helping students learn to learn and love to learn should be important objectives in every lesson presented by every teacher in every grade and in every subject.
4. Learning experiences should be constructed so that learners will not only have the opportunity to be Independent Learners, but so that the learners will learn how to become Independent Learners.
5. A variety of resources both in and out of the schools should be made available to both learners and teachers.

6. Curricula should be written to give learners latitude to satisfy their own learning needs in the subject areaS.

7. School administrators must accept and promote the idea of Independent Learning as a Common Essential Learning.

8. Some part of the school day should be organized so that learners can use the resources of the school to meet their individual learning needs which may not be met otherwise.

9. Teachers should receive training in counselling skills.

10. Teachers should be familiar with and use instructional strategies such as Inquiry, Discovery, Cooperative Learning, etc. which teach and promote the use of independent learning skills.

11. Teachers should be provided with in-service and in school support in attempting to promote Independent Learning while teaching their subject areas.

12. Teachers should identify where, when and how they will let learners participate in the education decision-making process.

13. Student evaluations should include a description of how the student is behaving as an Independent Learner.

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APPENDIX A

Objectives for Independent Learning

Diagnose Needs

In order to diagnose needs learners should be able to:

- understand own values
- relate own values to society's
- be self analytical
- understand demands of environment
- analyze personal experience
- respect rights of others in a democratic society
- demonstrate self-discipline
- be self regulating and responsible
- recognize oneself as developing and dynamic
- develop and maintain a positive self-concept
- respond to the social and cultural environment
- decide when and how to use others to diagnose needs
- work and communicate with others
- accept and respond positively to external criticism
- work independently with confidence
- make choices in learning which reflect personal needs and capabilities
- conduct oneself in a manner consistent with personal values and beliefs
- become aware of possible needs
- accept and understand the inevitability and effect of change

Set Objectives

Learner should be able to:

- describe outcomes of learning experiences
- evaluate and choose between alternative outcomes
- understand implications of various learning outcomes
- make decisions based upon a knowledge of their own needs and capabilities
- make decisions compatible with their environment
- construct achievable goals and plans to meet them

Identify Learning Resources

Learners should be able to:

- identify their preferred learning style
- identify the teaching style of others available as teachers and facilitators
- match their learning style with teaching styles
- identify varieties of external resources, print, non-print, human, etc.
- appropriately utilize external resources
- identify resources which can be used to meet learner needs and goals
- decide when, who and how to ask for help or direction

Use Resources

Learners should be able to:

- choose appropriate resources to meet needs and goals
- use a variety of available resources
- identify and get help in using resources which are not familiar
- use print, non-print, human and other resources to meet needs and goals
- use resources individually, in groups and in a one-to-one relationship to another person
- analyze their own skills and abilities
- demonstrate time management appropriate to meeting needs and goals
- analyze and understand the results of their decisions and use of resources
- choose resources which are consistent with their values and which are acceptable from society's point of view
- choose resources so that the rights of others are respected
- accept responsibility for choosing their learning resources
- work with others as a means to meeting learning goals
- choose a variety of ways to learn
- explore and enjoy alternative learning modes

Assess Learning

Learners should be able to:

- be analytical of themselves and the teaching/learning system they have constructed
- choose external resources to assess learning
- accept and responsibly respond to constructive criticism
- analyze the results of their learning experiences
- report the results and interpret the results of their learning experiences
- relate outcomes to prior and future needs
- identify, request and openly invite others to assess their learning
- be honest in their self-assessment
- assess each element, its contribution and its use in meeting learning goals
- be responsible for the assessment of their learning experiences

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